

13 JUNE 1975

CIA Behind the Cloak, A Placid Wooded Headquarters

On the surface are charges of assassination plots and illegal deeds. But underneath, there is an everyday human side.

By Jane Morse

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Until quite recently, one of the few provable facts known about the cloaked and secretive Central Intelligence Agency is that its headquarters are in Langley, Va., just outside Washington. Current probes of the organization suggest, however, that it may be a way out, and that anything at all could be going on there.

Indeed it is.

Although the knitting and crocheting club has adjourned for the summer, the 60-voice chorus continues to hold once-a-week practice sessions, the grand slam bridge club has regular duplicate games every Tuesday at 6:15 and the Bible study class gets together twice a week at midday.

The fact is that behind the shadowy, faceless spy facade and in the midst of recent revelations and investigations, there exists a not-so-faceless bunch of individuals linked by federal-style bureaucracy that's complete with a hyperactive employee activities association, a private washroom for the director, a credit union and a car pool. It has, as well, carved-in-marble a testimonial to honor 31 of its people killed in the line of duty, a clinic set up with the specialized equipment needed for the prompt treatment of heart attack victims (something that's required with startling regularity it is said), and a "helping hand" fund that takes up voluntary, anonymous collections to help staff members in need.

Nonetheless, these days, anyone who veers off the highway after the sign that says "CIA Next Right" is apt to cause other drivers and passengers to risk dislocating their vertebrae twisting for a look. It's hardly a wonder, of course. The place has never been on the Gray Line tour and there are relatively few people, outside the staff and its professional associates, who have ever been inside.



A CIA employee consults the agency's large collection of foreign newspapers. This and the pictures that follow were all released by the CIA.

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